GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:337
ANSWERED ON:18.08.2004
SAARC EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTERS` CONFERENCE
Mane Smt. Nivedita;Singh Shri Kirti Vardhan

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the SAARC External Affairs Ministers` Conference was held in Pakistan recently;

(b) if so, the details of the issues discussed therein;

(c) the details of the points raised by the Government in the said conference;

(d) whether there has been a one to one discussion between Indian and Pakistani External Affairs Ministers;

(e) if so, the details of the discussions held and the outcome thereof;

(f) whether the SAARC countries are contemplating to prepare its vision 2020; and

(g) if so, the details thereof and the extent to which this vision is likely to strengthen relations between the member countries?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a),(b),(c),(d),(e),(f)&(g) : A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN PARTS (a) to (g) OF THE ANSWER TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION No. 337 TO BE ANSWERED ON 18-8-2004

a) The 25th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of SAARC was held in Islamabad on July 20-21, 2004.

b) The agenda discussed issues related to Poverty Alleviation, establishment of a free trade area in SAARC (SAFTA), cooperation in matters relating to terrorism, energy, biotechnology, environment and communications. Discussions were also held on the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund, towards which India had agreed at the Twelfth Summit in January 2004 to contribute US$ 100 million to be deployed for projects in SAARC countries outside India. India offered additionally to finance feasibility studies for undertaking projects under the Fund. Discussions were also held on terrorism. All SAARC member countries emphasized the need to put an end to the scourge of terrorism and welcomed the offer of Bangladesh to host a Ministerial Meeting on cooperation among SAARC countries on combating terrorism and transnational crimes.

c) India made the following important proposals for regional cooperation.

i) Setting up of SAARC Parliamentary Forum to deliberate on issues pertaining to regional cooperation endeavours under SAARC, and offered to host the next meeting of the Forum.

ii) Establishment of a SAARC High Economic Council formed with the Finance and Commerce Ministers of the SAARC Member Countries to promote ideas and initiatives related to regional economic integration in economic, trade, financial and monetary areas.

iii) Setting up of a SAARC Infrastructure Fund to fund major infrastructure projects in the region.

iv) Setting up of National Committees in member countries mandated to monitor and devise programmes to implement the goals of the SAARC Social Charter, as well as consult with each other to promote collaborative Poverty Alleviation Projects, including under the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund.

v) As part of the SAARC Awareness Year for TB and HIV/AIDS, the Council decided to give a SAARC Youth Award for `Dedicated Community Services in the field of TB and/or HIV/AIDS. India offered to host a meeting this year of experts and community workers, train paramedics from the SAARC countries, and also offered to send medical vans and mobile awareness units to each of the SAARC countries.

The above proposals were endorsed by other SAARC countries.

d) & e) On the margins of the SAARC meeting, EAM met Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri, and also called on the Prime Minister and the President of Pakistan. Issues related to SAARC and the recent developments in bilateral relations were discussed. Both sides reiterated the importance of continuing the Dialogue in an atmosphere free of violence, and to tackling the scourge of terrorism.

f) & g) The Report of the Group of Eminent Persons, submitted to the 10th SAARC Summit in Colombo in July, 1998, details a roadmap for achievement of a SAARC Customs Union by 2015, leading to SAARC Economic Union by 2020, together with the creation of a Common Investment Area for facilitating the flow of foreign direct investment.